

Montana GEAR UP

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education / Montana University System



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Welcome from GEAR UP Director, Sandy Merdinger

Greetings to all of you as we begin the 2003-04 school year! It is my pleasure and honor to be serving as the Montana GEAR UP director. For the last five years I've worked in the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education with the Perkins program. Most recently I was the post-secondary grants manager for the program. Prior to my time here, I was at the UM-Helena College of Technology as the Director of Financial Aid and Assistant Dean. In the past I've also worked at the Montana Career Information System and the Montana Low Income Coalition. Several of my previous work experiences are serving me well as I've entered the world of GEAR UP.

Although those of you that have been with the program since its inception are probably not too excited about more changes, there will be some changes made this year that I hope will streamline the program, yet still give us the accountability now required by the U.S. Department of Education. Two Grant Managers will oversee all of the grants awarded to the schools. Peter Butler will serve as grant manager for schools in the western part of the state and Everall Fox will do

the same for schools in eastern Montana. Although you most likely know Everall and Peter from last year, be sure to check out the articles elsewhere in the newsletter to learn a little more about them. Many of you have probably noticed the Implementation Plan has been streamlined for this year. With this format we hope to get the information we need but make less work for you. The budget narrative piece was added this year in response to increased accountability requests from the Department of Education.

As many of you have already heard, there will be a sixth year of funding for GEAR UP, so as we enter this fifth year of the program we still have ample opportunity to make changes to effect the lives of our students and increase their attendance and success in college. If you have ideas on ways to improve the program, be sure to pass them on to your grant manager or contact me directly. I was happy to meet many of you at the fall conference and want you to know we are doing what we can to act on many of your suggestions to improve the program. During the year I hope to see many of you and learn more about your programs. Don't hesitate to let us know how we can better serve you!

New Faces in the Commissioners Office

As with the GEAR UP office, the Commissioner's office has also undergone some changes as well. Dr. Sheila Stearns was appointed by the Board of Regents as Montana's newest Commissioner of Higher Education in June, and began her tenure on September 1st. Dr. Stearns is from rural Montana, and has been committed to education throughout her career. She comes to us after serving as President of Wayne State College in Nebraska. Prior to that, Sheila was the Chancellor at the University of Montana-Western in Dillon.

We are also happy to welcome Dr. Roger Barber who arrived one week after Dr. Stearns, and will serve as the Interim Deputy Commissioner for Student and Academic Affairs. The Division of Academic and Student Affairs is responsible for conducting the review of all academic programs and policies of the Montana University System, which includes oversight of programs like Montana GEAR UP. Dr. Barber has served the Mon-



From left to right; GEAR UP Director Sandy Merdinger, Commissioner Sheila Stearns, and Interim Deputy Commissioner Roger Barber

tana University System at many levels, from professor to Provost and Vice Chancellor for over 25 years. Drs. Barber and Stearns were given high marks at their first Board of Regents meeting in September, just weeks after coming on board, and are both very supportive of Montana GEAR UP and what we do for students throughout Montana.

Fourth Annual GEAR UP Fall Conference “Taking the Next Steps”



Dr. Henrietta Mann delivers Tuesdays keynote address

The fourth annual Montana GEAR UP conference was held on September 22nd and 23rd at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls, MT, and was said to be, by one attendee, “the best conference yet!”

Although attendance was lower than we had hoped, the folks who made it almost unanimously had very positive things to say in their evaluations about the conference overall.

The keynote addresses on Monday and Tuesday of the conference offered two very different messages, but both related to changing expectations, and partnering for success.

On Monday, Mr. Ranjit Sidhu, the Vice President for the National Council for Community and Educational Partnerships in Washington D.C., offered a perspective from the national level on how rural Montana Schools can effectively establish partnerships with large corporations.

On Tuesday, we were extremely grateful to have in attendance Dr. Henrietta Mann, whose address hushed the audience and held them eagerly captivated to every point she made. Dr. Mann overwhelmingly received the highest marks in our evaluations, with positive comments from everyone. We truly hope that we will be able to bring her to our conferences in the future.

2003 Summer Camps

Over the summer, Montana GEAR UP funded 12 summer camps across the state that were attended by over 230 GEAR UP students. Camps included “A Walk Among the Buffalo,” “Relive the Renaissance,” an array of “technology” camps, and the always popular “Montana Science Institute.”

Studies have demonstrated that campus experiences are one of the best ways to change students’ expectations of themselves, and get them interested in attending college, which is one of Montana GEAR UP’s foremost goals. We believe that offering summer camps on college campuses is one of the best ways to achieve this, while demonstrating to students that there are opportunities out there that they may not have thought of prior to going to one of our summer camps.



Students at the Montana Science Institute



Science and Engineering for Future Leaders

We have always selected camps that incorporate the college is possible for all message. Camps will always focus on academic preparation, but also include an element of fun.

Students who have attended summer camps have always had fun, and in many cases go home with new ideas and attitudes regarding careers and college.

If you have ideas of what you would like to see offered for camps next summer, or ways that we can improve the process, please let us know, because these are simply super opportunities for our students!

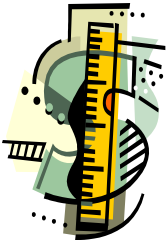
What's new with the GEAR UP Counseling Component?

This month, Montana GEAR UP awarded a sub-grant to Montana State University to continue work with the counseling project. As a part of the grant, a school counseling institute will be held in the spring. It will be an expansion and extension of the school counseling conference held last spring. The date will be announced shortly, so watch for it in the newsletter, or check the website to find out as soon as it is set. The grant also includes technical assistance to the field. Let your grant manager know if you would like some technical assistance in the counseling field, and he will arrange it with MSU. GEAR UP staff will also receive training

regarding the school counseling program design, development and evaluation so they can better see the needs of the field. The strategies covered in the grant are aimed at 1) infusing early college awareness into Montana University System school counseling graduate programs, and into school counseling programs across the state; 2) providing sustainability of a pro-college culture, and 3) maintaining technical support and a collaborative relationship with GEAR UP schools.



Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program Update



Not to be outdone by the Commissioner's office, the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan program has undergone some changes of their own. We welcomed Bruce Marks in July as the new Director. Marks will succeed Arlene Hannawalt, who retired after six years as Director and sixteen years with the organization. Bruce comes to Montana from Ore-

gon where he served as the Deputy Director of the Oregon Student Assistance Commission since 1999.

The 2003-2004 school year GEAR UP Financial Aid Presentations are currently being scheduled in October, November, December, and January by the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program office. These are for grades 6-12. To view dates already confirmed, go the GEAR UP calendar at <http://www.calsnet.net/mtgucalendar>, confirmed dates will be posted in red. If you need to schedule visits or have any questions, please contact Tina Wagner at (406)-444-0350 or twagner@mglsp.state.mt.us. We look forward to coming to your school soon!

Montana GEAR UP Achievement Grant Information

What is the Achievement Grant?

Montana state GEAR UP awards the Achievement Grants to students planning to pursue a postsecondary education.

Students meeting the eligibility requirements must apply during the first semester of 11th grade.

What is the amount of the grant?

The award is \$1000, which must be used towards the cost of higher education. The funds will be held in a Montana Family Education Savings Account until the student requests a disbursement of the funds, enrolls and begins attending college.

Where can the grant be used?

A student may use the grant at two- or four-year institutions, technical schools or any educational institution in the United States that meets the eligibility requirements for the Montana Family Education Savings Program. To use the grant, the student must be enrolled in a post-secondary institution within 18 months of high school graduation.

When will the awards be announced?

The awards are announced in December.

Who is eligible to apply ?

To apply the student must:

- be enrolled at the time of application in a GEAR UP affiliated Montana high school; and on track to complete courses within the accepted college preparatory curriculum (MT Board of Regents Policy 301.7); and,
- have a cumulative 2.0 grade point average (GPA) at the end of the 4th semester of high school; and,
- be enrolled in the 11th grade and tracked by a GEAR UP high school; and
- have been enrolled in a GEAR UP middle school for at least 2 years beginning no later than the 8th grade.
- Your GEAR UP school administration may add criteria to the eligibility requirements. Please contact the GEAR UP counselor at your school for additional information.
- To remain eligible to receive the grant upon graduation, a recipient must graduate with a 2.0 GPA from an accredited Montana high school.

How does a student apply ?

To learn more about applying for the GEAR UP Achievement Grant, contact your GEAR UP Liaison, or Sally Speer at the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program (406) 444-0638



So who are Peter and Everall?

A message from Everall Fox: Welcome back to a new school year as well as a new year of GEAR UP. Sandy asked Peter and I to tell you a bit about ourselves, so here are some things you should know about me:

I was born at Ft. Belknap Agency, and grew up in Hays. I am an enrolled member of the White Clay tribe of Fort Belknap. I attended K-12 schools at Hays-Lodgepole. I participated in football, wrestling and track. After graduating from Hays-Lodgepole High School, I attended Northern Montana College in Havre, and received my BS in Secondary Education. I received an MA in Education from the University of Montana. I taught Middle School Social Studies for 11 years, at Hays, Gardnerville, Nevada and St. Labre. Prior to coming to Helena to work for GEAR UP, I spent the last four years teaching at St. Labre. I have been an assistant football coach as well as a head coach in track and basketball. My spouse, Melissa, and I have two children; our daughter Rosie is three, and our son Sky is one. My

interests include working with issues that affect Indian Education in the state and addressing the needs of minorities and low-income students in preparing for post-secondary education. My hobbies include spending time with my children and family, golfing, fishing, learning to play guitar and reading, especially about history and the social sciences. I enjoy watching reruns of "Seinfeld", and watching a show on the Discovery Channel called, "American Chopper". I am a fan of all sports, especially the Montana Grizzlies, as well as the Colorado Rockies, Sacramento Kings, Colorado Avalanche and the Dallas Cowboys.



Everall hard at work

MONTANA GEAR UP GRANT MANAGER SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS Academic Year 2003-04

Peter Butler

Arrowhead
Charlo
Brady
Browning
Evergreen
Heart Butte
Kila
Lincoln
Vaughn
St. Ignatius

Everall Fox

Box Elder
Bloomfield
Hardin
Harlem
Hays
Lame Deer
Pryor
Rocky Boy
Wibaux
Winnett

A Message from Peter Butler:

Another school year is underway, and I now have a full year under my belt with the GEAR UP program. I have been fortunate to have met many of you, but perhaps it has been all work, and you haven't gotten a chance to learn more about who I am away from the office.

Before I came to work in the commissioner's office I worked for Montana State University-Billings on another federal program for the Social Security Administration where I helped people with disabilities understand how they could maximize their benefits. I got into this because of my knowledge of deaf culture, and American sign language which I have been involved with at varying degrees for more than fifteen years. While I was at the university, I



was also pursuing my masters degree in public relations, which I completed in 2002. My undergraduate degree is in communications, and I worked on that, starting at the University of Kentucky in Lexington where I also graduated from high school, then Montana State, and I ultimately finished up at MSU-Billings. I enjoyed a rather long college career, as I found myself easily distracted

Bozeman two. The semesters that I was in class, I worked for a construction company building log homes.

I have been a fly fishing enthusiast since I was young, thanks to both of my grandfathers, and continue to enjoy the sport as often as possible, which is less frequent now than it used to be, but that's ok because I now spend my free time with my one-year-old son, William, and my wife of four years, Bridget. Bridget also enjoys floating rivers and being outdoors, but we learned early that husbands do not make good fly casting instructors.

Like Everall, I enjoy being a spectator of all sports, but the only team that I really follow year after year and feel loyal to is the MSU Bobcat Football team, which is not something I recommend for the weak at heart.

There is more to all of these stories, but we'll save it for another time in person, where I hope to learn more about you too!

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406-444-0425

Montana GEAR UP website
<http://www.gearup.montana.edu>

Montana Guaranteed Student Loan website:
<http://www.mgslp.state.mt.us/>

National GEAR UP website:
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/gearup/index.html>